

Message Text

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AMCONSUL KARACHI

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PK

SUBJECT: EX-AMIR OF BAHAWALPUR BECOMES GOVERNOR OF PUNJAB

REF: LAHORE 875

1. AS EXPECTED (REFTEL), GHULAM MUSTAFA KHAR'S RESIGNATION AS GOVERNOR OF PUNJAB WAS ACCEPTED EFFECTIVE JULY 31 AND MOHAMMAD ABBAS ABBASI, FORMER AMIR OF BAHAWALPUR STATE, WAS SWORN IN AS SUCCESSOR SAME AFTERNOON. I ATTENDED SHORT-NOTICE BUT IMPRESSIVE SWEARING-IN CEREMONY AT GOVERNOR'S HOUSE IN WHICH CHIEF MINISTER QURESHI AND OTHER SENIOR ADMIN AND JUDICIAL OFFICIALS PARTICIPATED. KHAR CONSPICUOUS BY ABSENCE.

2. ABBASI, POINTEDLY REFERRED TO AS "MR." THROUGHOUT PROCEEDINGS, ABDICATED AS AMIR ON AGREEING TO MERGER OF PRINCELY STATE INTO WEST PAKISTAN IN 1955. HE IS QUIET, DISTINGUISHED PERSON WHO APPEARS IDEALLY SUITED FOR PLAYING LARGELY CEREMONIAL ROLE OF GOVERNOR UNDER PRESENT CONSTITUTIONAL SYSTEM. APPOINTMENT IS WIDELY VIEWED AS REPUTATION OF POLITICAL MEDDLING BY HIS PREDECESSOR AND CONFIRMATION OF SUPREMACY OF CHIEF MINISTER IN GOVERNING PROVINCE. INTERESTINGLY, NEW GOVERNOR AND CHIEF MINISTER MADE DISPLAY

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OF AFFECTIONATE EMBRACE AT DAIS IMMEDIATELY AFTER CEREMONY.

3. ADDITIONAL SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ABBASI'S SELECTION, AS SUGGESTED IN REFTEL, IS GENERAL ASSUMPTION THAT IT WAS DESIGNED TO MOLLIFY PROVINCIAL SEPARATIST SENTIMENT AMONG PEOPLE OF BAHAWALPUR, NOW A DIVISION OF PUNJAB. KNOWLEDGEABLE OBSERVERS RECALL THAT ABBASI ENCOURAGED ADVOCATES OF "BAHAWALPUR SUBAH (PROVINCE)" IN 1970 GENERAL ELECTIONS, MOST OF WHOM DEFEATED PPP OPPONENTS. OBSERVERS, INCLUDING BAHAWALPUR OPPOSITIONISTS WITH WHOM I TALKED AFTER CEREMONY, AGREE THAT ABBASI'S EXAMPLE IN ACCEPTING GOVERNORSHIP WILL BE INTERPRETED AS CLEAN CHANGE OF HEART AND FULL SUPPORT FOR STATUS QUO WHICH, THEY SAY, LIKELY TO BE PERSUASIVE WITH PUBLIC.

4. INDICATIVE OF THIS IS POINTED SENTENCE IN PRIME MINISTER BHUTTO'S LETTER OF APPOINTMENT TO ABBASI, PROMINENTLY DISPLAYED IN PRESS AUGUST 1 AND NOTED BY POLITICAL PUNDITS: "I AM SURE THAT YOUR APPOINTMENT WILL BE A TOKEN OF MY GOVERNMENT'S REGARD FOR BAHAWALPUR'S EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE AFFAIRS OF THE PROVINCE OF THE PUNJAB." PRIMIN WENT ON TO OBSERVE THAT "RECTIFYING...NEGLECT IN DEVELOPMENT FELT BY THE PEOPLE OF BAHAWALPUR" WAS ONE OF OBJECTIVES OF GOP, AND THAT APPOINTMENT WAS "TANGIBLE SIGN OF RECOGNITION OF SIGNAL SERVICE" RENDERED BY ABBASI'S FATHER IN DECIDING TO ACCEED STATE TO PAKISTAN IN 1947 AGAINST HEAVY PRESSURE.

5. WE HAVE NO CLEAR INDICATION YET AS TO KHAR'S PLANS BUT HEAR INCREASINGLY THAT HE WILL BE AWARDED SEAT IN PUNJAB ASSEMBLY FROM WHICH TO KEEP HIS HAND IN PROVINCIAL HULITICS. PRIMIN, PRESIDENT CHOUDHRY AND OTHER GOP LEADERS VISITING LAHORE AUGUST 1 AND PUNJAB CABINET NOW LIKELY TO BE FIRMED UP.

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